

Calming Breath Exercise

Washington State Employee Assistance Program

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This is an exercise adapted from yoga. It is a very efficient technique for achieving a deep state of relaxation quickly. Try it; it works! Your EAP professionals have many other techniques to offer you as well. Give them a call.

1. Breathing from your abdomen, inhale through your nose slowly to a count of five (count slowly “one...two...three...four...five...” as you inhale).
2. Pause and hold your breath to a count of five.
3. Exhale slowly, through your nose or mouth, to a count of five (or more if it takes you longer). Be sure to exhale fully.
4. When you’ve exhaled completely, take two breaths in your normal rhythm and then repeat steps 1 through 3 in the cycle above.
5. Keep up the exercise for at least three to five minutes. This should involve going through at least ten cycles on the in-five, out-five. As you continue the exercise, you may notice that you can count higher, or count higher when you exhale than when you inhale. Allow these variations in your counting to occur if they do and just continue with the exercise for up to five minutes. Remember to take two normal breaths between each cycle. If you start to feel light-headed while practicing this exercise, stop for thirty seconds and then start again.
6. Throughout the exercise, keep your breathing smooth and regular, without gulping in breaths or breathing out suddenly.
7. Optional: Each time you exhale, you may wish to say, “relax,” “calm,” “let go,” or any other relaxing word or phrase silently to yourself. Allow your whole body to let go as you do this. If you keep this up each time you practice, eventually just saying your relaxing work by itself will bring on a mild state of relaxation.

This exercise can be a potent technique for halting the momentum of a panic reaction when the first sign of anxiety comes on. It is also useful in reducing symptoms of hyperventilation. This one and additional exercises can be found in the [Anxiety and Phobia Workbook](#) by Edmund J. Bourne.